DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 828 FL 801 466

AUTHOR Sample, Barbara J.
TITLE WorkStyles: Pre-Employment for the Low Level English Speaker.
INSTITUTION Spring Inst. for International Studies, Denver, CO.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Refugee Resettlement (DHHS), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1998-00-00
NOTE 5p.
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.springinstitute.com/elt/pdf/workstyl.pdf.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; Class Activities;.Classroom Techniques; Employment Interviews; *English (Second Language); Immigrants; Limited English Speaking; Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning

ABSTRACT

The WorkStyles program is described in some detail. The program is designed specifically for limited English speakers to address barriers to learning and employment grounded in a lack of confidence in the use of English. In order to develop these skills for low level learners, the training is divided into various segments including the following: "Active Listening"; "Completing Applications"; "Identifying Skills and Positive Qualities"; and "Doing Well in Interviews." Students in these programs have lost a lot of control over their lives and the option to communicate in their own language. This program, by helping them to communicate more effectively in the U.S., gives them back some of that control. (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education) (KFT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original document.

ED 458 828

Spring Institute for International Studies

E L T

Technical Assistance for
English Language Training Projects
1997-1998

Sponsored by the
Office of Refugee Resettlement

WorkStyles:
Pre-Employment for the Low Level English Speaker

By Barbara J. Sample, Vice President
and Director of Education
Spring Institute for International Studies

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Barbara Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL801460

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FL801466

Spring Institute for International Studies

E L T

Technical Assistance for
English Language Training Projects
1997-1998

Sponsored by the
Office of Refugee Resettlement

WorkStyles:
Pre-Employment for the Low Level English Speaker

By Barbara J. Sample, Vice President
and Director of Education
Spring Institute for International Studies

A year ago I went through customs in Mongolia. I had been handed an immigration card on the plane and painstakingly decoded the Mongolian words in Cyrillic script so I could transfer information from my passport onto the form. I experienced first hand the frustration (and fear brought on by my lack of confidence) that many of our low level students experience when they try to fill out forms in English.

How can people with extremely low level English language proficiency learn the skills to get and keep a job in the United States? When I think of trying to get through a job interview in a second language, or even of attempting to fill out an application in a script I am not familiar with (as I did in Mongolia), the task seems pretty daunting. But there are ways to help our students gain the skills and confidence to accomplish these tasks in English. This article outlines strategies that have helped people get and keep jobs. Activities utilized in WorkStyles, a pre-employment program offered by the Spring Institute, will be used to illustrate some of these ideas.

First, a look at the WorkStyles program: Spring Institute offers a program designed for limited English speakers specifically to address the barriers to learning created by lack of confidence and self-esteem. WorkStyles is a two-week intensive course focusing on pre-employability and personal effectiveness skills, utilizing a competency-based approach. The content includes developing resumes, completing application forms, practicing interviews, and making phone calls about jobs, as well as setting goals, identifying skills, understanding American work culture, and solving problems on the job. This content is the context for learning and acquiring English language skills

WorkStyles sets up a challenging yet supportive environment for learning and employs a variety of strategies which help to reinforce self-confidence by encouraging people to share their knowledge and experience: videotaped role plays, brainstorming activities, skits to demonstrate cross-cultural situations, small-group problem solving, and individual exercises. As people participate in these activities, they build skills, they take risks, and they gain confidence in their ability to handle new, unfamiliar situations.

Now a look at several skills and ways to develop these skills for low level learners. We will briefly discuss Active Listening, Completing Applications, Identifying Skills and Positive Qualities, and Doing Well in Interviews.

Active Listening - Active listening, a deceptively simple yet powerful communication skill, is one of the best ways for limited English speakers to gain confidence in their ability to communicate in English. Active listening is simply the strategy of repeating what has been understood, or giving feedback to confirm understanding. Our students can use this valuable skill not only on the job to follow instructions but also in an interview or on the phone to get clarification.

It is fine for our students to be able to say "Please repeat" or "I don't understand", but these statements often actually stop communication. Active listening can keep the conversation going. Instead of answering "Yes" to the question "Do you understand?" (especially when they really don't), your students

can say, "So, you said ...." and repeat the question or the instructions. It gives them a way to be responsible for understanding what has been said to them by giving the speaker a chance to clarify anything that was misunderstood.

How can people learn the communication skill of active listening when they don't speak much English? Consciously teach your students the strategy of repeating what they understand to confirm their understanding. Try Listen, Repeat, Do and Information Gap activities. (See SCANS Plans Portfolio.)

Completing Applications - Applications are especially difficult for low level learners because so much of the vocabulary is uniquely "form language". In addition, most companies have their own application form making it difficult for students to prepare by following a model. Finally, some companies use an applicant's ability to fill the form out properly as a way to screen potential employees.

How can we help low level learners with this important task? In general, start with the known and move to the unknown, from the simple to the complex. For example, begin with the oral language for personal information that people already know (*I'm from Russia.*) Link the meaning to the written words which commonly elicit that information on an application form (*country* or *nationality*). Use word and picture cards to give students time to familiarize themselves with the application vocabulary. Then move to reading those words on simple forms and filling in the appropriate personal information. (See SCANS Plans Portfolio.)

Identifying Skills and Positive Qualities - Being able to talk about your skills and positive qualities is very important in applying for a job in the US, but the concept is difficult for people from many other cultures to understand. Why would you say good things about yourself? Other people can say good things about you, but it is rude for you to do it. How can we work with low level learners in this area which involves both language and culture?

Start with skills first. Use a variety of pictures which illustrate jobs and skills, and teach the words for the things your students can do (*sell, clean, cook, fix, cut*, etc.) First, work with oral language, having your students work in pairs to ask and answer the question "What can you do?" Then write the words for the skills and job titles on flip chart pages that can be put up around the room. Add to the list each day so that your students expand their ability to talk and write about themselves.

Then introduce positive qualities by performing short skits which illustrate different qualities like *patient, honest, punctual, neat*. Have students practice in pairs asking the question "What are your strong points?" and answering with sentences like "I am *patient.*", identifying qualities that are true about them. It is important to acknowledge that saying good things about yourself is a peculiarly American job search phenomenon. It is not considered rude if "selling yourself" is done in a sincere and not proud or aggressive way.

Finally, combine skills and qualities. Have students tell you their previous job experience, skills, and personal qualities in answer to "Tell me about yourself". For example, "I am a repair man. I can fix TVs, radios, and cassette recorders. I am patient, careful, and dependable." As people talk about themselves, write their "stories" using the language experience approach. These stories help students read, they provide a model for filling in application forms, and they become a practice sheet for interviews. (See SCANS Plans Portfolio)

Doing Well in Interviews - Getting through a job interview is a challenge for anyone, but it is especially hard for people from other cultures where a formal interview is not required to get a job. The key to preparing low level learners for interviews is to work on it in small steps. In WorkStyles we begin with the introduction. Students start by interviewing another student and introducing that person to the class. The next step is to introduce themselves on video. Next they watch and debrief two model interviews, one "good as gold" and one "awfully awful". After that we elicit the phrases they should say and actions they should perform during the first part of an interview. Something like the following is usually what gets generated and written on the flip chart:

1. *Hello, my name is* ____ ____ . (The space between the first and last name indicates a definite pause. We work on saying both names clearly and slowly so that someone who is not familiar with the pronunciation has a chance of actually hearing the distinction between the two names and perhaps remembering at least one of them.) [Firm hand shake.] (We exaggerate the difference between a firm handshake, a dead fish and a knuckle cruncher in role plays.)
2. *I'm here to apply for the* ____ *job.*
   [Eye contact.] [Sit down after the boss.]
3. *Here is my resume.*

These three phrases are practiced over and over with trainers, in pairs, and at home until the phrases are virtually automatic. We practice answering several questions they might be asked such as "Tell me about yourself." "How's your English?" and "What are your strong points." At this point people are ready for their first video taped interview. Each step getting to this point is small but significant. Subsequent steps are also significant. Ultimately, people complete four video taped assignments, two introductions and two interviews. The challenge is real and the support is substantial. People surprise themselves and inspire others with the barriers they are able to overcome in order to gain the skills for employment. (See SCANS Plans Portfolio)

Conclusion: One of the things our students have lost in their move to this country is control over their own lives. Perhaps the most important ability they have lost is the option to communicate in their own language. In our role as language teachers we have an enormous opportunity to help people gain the skills to become independent and to communicate in English. What we have learned through our work in WorkStyles is that developing skills is an important part of the process of raising self-esteem and increasing self-confidence. And these are the keys to becoming self-sufficient.